IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

<u>UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION</u>

FOR

Method and System for Providing Texts for Voice Requests

Inventor(s): I-Cheng Chen
243 Buena Vista Avenue, Apt# 1706
Sunnyvale, CA 94086
Citizenship: Taiwan

Assignee: IntoVoice Corporation
1306 Bordeaux Drive
Sunnyvale, CA 94089

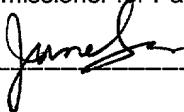Docket No.: 2500-03

Express Mail Label # <u>EK806098852US</u>;   Date of Deposit: <u>01/31/2001</u>

I hereby certify that this paper or fee is being deposited with the United States Postal Service using "Express Mail Post Office To Addressee" service under 37 CFR 1.10 on the date indicated above and is addressed to "Assistant Commissioner for Patents, Washington, DC 20231."
Name: __JUNE SUN__   Signature: _____

1

Method and System for Providing Texts for Voice Requests

I-Cheng Chen

Docket No.: 2500-03

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application claims the benefits of the provisional applications, No. 60/179,710, entitled " Method and System for Mapping Spoken Text to Standard Text", No. 60/179,709, entitled "Method and System for Dynamically Configuring Grammars", both filed on 2/1/2000, which are hereby incorporated by reference for all purposes.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

The present invention generally relates to the area of voice interactive technologies and more particularly relates to a method and a system for mapping a spoken text to a standard text identifying a piece of detailed information, wherein the spoken text is generally a short or verbal version of what is meant for the standard text. The present invention also relates to a method and a system for locally archiving information that is currently or potentially highly demanded by users and minimizing ambiguities between two words/phrases that might be pronounced indistinctly.

Background of Related Art

The Internet is a rapidly growing communication network of interconnected computers and computer networks around the

world. Together, these millions of connected computers form a repository of multimedia information that is readily accessible by any of the connected computers from anywhere at any time. In order to provide mobility and portable access to the World Wide Web, many portable devices are introduced to provide connectivity to the World Wide Web. Most of such portable devices, such as mobile phones and palm computers, however, do not provide a full capacity of user interfaces such as a large display screen, a stereo sound system and a full functional keyboard. Although some type of automatic or assisted key-in methods have been developed to facilitate the data entry to the portable devices, at the same time, problems resulted from such developments have been introduced unexpectedly. For example, a user of such portable device has to look at the tiny screen while entering data. When the user is driving a car, such interaction with a portable device would likely cause accidents because the interaction essentially takes the user's eyes off the steering wheel. In fact, many states in US are considering legislative measures to regulate the use of such portable devices which operating a vehicle.

On the other side, the use of a portable device while driving is still popular because the portable device provides useful information for a driver. For example, a driver could get directional, traffic and weather information of a selected city or a route from the portable device communicating with the Internet. In additional, the driver may desire to be in touch with his/her contacts through emails while on the go. It has been a dilemma between providing

3

an information assistant and potentially causing traffic accidents while operating a vehicle. Thus many considerations and factors have prompted the adoption of voice interactive services that permit voice interactions with a portable device. Assisted by a voice recognition system, a user can simply speak to the device and listen to requested information.

One problem with the voice interactive services is that a user has to speak clearly and completely so that a proxy server would understand what exactly the user is looking for. When it comes to information identified by a long name consisting of multiple words, it would be tedious and awkward to speak each of the multiple words. There is thus a need for a generic solution that accommodates spoken words that are typically a shortened version of a lone name identifying the desired information.

In voice interactive systems, it is desirable to provide desired information upon receiving a request. The requested information is typically hosted in a server remotely located and communicated over a network. To respond to the request, the requested information will be fetched from the server over the network and subsequently delivered to a user who has made the request. In many situations, a piece of particular information is so demanding that repeated requests are received therefor, which causes repeated fetching of the same information over the network. The voice interactive systems could suffer from lack of computing resources that have to be allocated to timely fulfill the repeated requests and at the same time cause tremendous network traffics

in the network. There is thus another need for a voice interactive system to provide a solution that can fulfill the repeated requests timely without affecting system performance and causing traffics to the network.

5   Still there are many words that might be pronounced indifferently from other words, hence causing retrieval of incorrect information. There is yet another need for a voice interactive system to provide a mechanism that can minimize ambiguities between two words, phrases, symbols, identifiers that might be
10   pronounced indistinctly

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention has been made in consideration of the above described problems and needs and has particular applications to voice interactive systems and applications. According to one aspect of the present invention, an audio signal is received from a caller. The audio signal is speech-recognized to produce a spoken text that contains one or more key words referring to a piece of information interesting to the caller. The key words are locally processed with a local search data set to formulate an identifier linking to the information that may be locally or remotely obtainable. As a result, a caller is relieved from an otherwise strict requirement that the caller has to speak every single word of an identifier of a piece of information. As used herein, an identifier includes one or more words and is used as a label, a symbol, an icon, a file name or a representation of a piece of information. Generally a correct identifier must be provided, the information can be located among many categories or kinds of information.

According to another aspect of the invention, a local search data is generated from a group of identifiers, each of the identifiers pointing to a piece of information. A histogram is computed from the group of identifiers to determine a generic words group and a key words group. The generic words group includes words that may be interpreted as so generic and add very little information an identifier under an information category. Oppositely, the key words group includes words that may be interpreted as so specific and what

6

could be included in a spoken text from a caller. The local search data is then formed by words in the key words group. When a spoken text is received, words in the spoken text are processed to find the corresponding key words in the local search data. Once the searched key words are obtained, the identifier comprising the searched key words is obtained. Hence the information identified by the identifier can be retrieved locally or fetched remotely.

According to yet another aspect of the present invention, the received requests from callers for information are being monitored. When a counter of an identifier being requested many times in a predetermined period, the counter exceeds a threshold. The identifier is entered into a local information reservoir. The local information reservoir hosts the information that is highly demanding by the callers. To keep the information updated, the information reservoir is configured to update the information automatically with a source thereof. As a result, requests for the highly demanded information could be fulfilled locally and contributions to the network traffics could be minimized.

According to still another aspect of the present invention, another use of the counter is to mark an identifier when the designated counter exceeds a threshold. The purpose of marking a highly demanded identifier (a piece of associated information) is to minimize ambiguities between two identifiers that might be pronounced indistinctly.

According to still another aspect of the present invention, an identifier can be added into the local information reservoir to anticipate high demanding thereof. In situations in which callers may demand a piece of particular information as soon as an event starts or ends, an identifier of the particular information is initially added into the local information reservoir regardless how many of requests for the information are received. Thus callers can get the information locally or as soon as it becomes available.

The invention may be implemented as a method, an apparatus, a system or a software product. The processes, sequences or steps and features disclosed in the present invention are related to each other and each is believed independently novel in the art. The disclosed processes, sequences or steps and features may be performed alone or in any combination to provide a novel and unobvious system or a portion of a system.

Accordingly, it is one of the objects of the present invention to provide a solution for mapping a spoken text to a standard text identifying a piece of detailed information. It is another one of the objects of the present invention to provide a method and a system for locally archiving information that is currently or potentially highly demanded by users. It is still another one of the objects of the present invention to provide a mechanism to minimize ambiguities between two words, phrases, identifiers, symbols that might be pronounced indistinctly

Other objects, features, and advantages of the present invention will become apparent upon examining the following detailed description of an embodiment thereof, taken in conjunction with the attached drawings.

5

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

These and other features, aspects, and advantages of the present invention will become better understood with regard to the following description, appended claims, and accompanying drawings where:

Figure 1 illustrates an exemplary configuration in which the present invention may be practiced;

Figure 2A illustrates a functional block diagram of an information server according to one embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 2B shows a block diagram of a preferred internal construction of a computer system that may be used to implement the present invention or facilitate the applications of the present invention;

Figure 3A illustrates an exemplary information reservoir according to one embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 3B illustrates a diagram of counter vs. time to demonstrate when an identifier is to be entered into a local information reservoir;

Figure 3C shows an example of an identifier being entered into a local information reservoir to anticipate high demands of the information;

Figure 4A shows a flowchart of a process implementing archiving information in a local information reservoir according to one embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 4B shows a flowchart of a process that can be implemented to minimize ambiguities between two identifiers that might be pronounced indistinctly;

Figure 5A shows a functional diagram of generating an identifier from spoken words by a caller;

Figure 5B illustrates an example in which the spoken words are "Paolo's in Sunnyvale" and the final identifier is "PAOLO'S RESTAURANT";

Figure 6A shows a flowchart of a process of generating a local searching data set;

Figure 6B shows a histogram computed from a group of identifiers, each including one or more words or symbols;

Figure 6C shows a group of identifiers under a restaurant category;

Figure 6D shows a histogram computed from a group of identifiers in **Figure 6C**;

Figure 6E shows an identifier "The Texas Fish and Chips Food" reformatted from "The Texas Fish & Chips Food";

Figure 6F shows an exemplary portion of a tree structure for keywords of the identifiers in **Figure 6C**;

Figure 6G shows a key word possibly leads to two other key words; and

Figure 6H shows an identifier is reconstructed from a number of key words.

11

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

In the following detailed description of the present invention, numerous specific details are set forth in order to provide a thorough understanding of the present invention. However, it will become obvious to those skilled in the art that the present invention may be practiced without these specific details. In other instances, well known methods, procedures, components, and circuitry have not been described in detail to avoid unnecessarily obscuring aspects of the present invention. The detailed description is presented largely in terms of procedures, logic blocks, processing, and other symbolic representations that directly or indirectly resemble the operations of data processing devices coupled to networks. These process descriptions and representations are the means used by those experienced or skilled in the art to most effectively convey the substance of their work to others skilled in the art.

Reference herein to "one embodiment" or "an embodiment" means that a particular feature, structure, or characteristic described in connection with the embodiment can be included in at least one embodiment of the invention. The appearances of the phrase "in one embodiment" in various places in the specification are not necessarily all referring to the same embodiment, nor are separate or alternative embodiments mutually exclusive of other embodiments. Further, the order of blocks in process flowcharts or diagrams representing one or more embodiments of the invention

12

do not inherently indicate any particular order nor imply any limitations in the invention.

Referring now to the drawings, in which like numerals refer to like parts throughout the several views. **Figure 1** illustrates an exemplary configuration in which the present invention may be practiced. Network **100** is a telephone network that may include, but not be limited to, a public switched telephone network (PSTN) and a wireless network. Phone **112** may represent one of numerous telephonic devices on network **100** and communicate with an information gateway **114** coupled between network **100** and data network **116**. Examples of the telephonic devices may include, but not be limited to, a landline telephone, a mobile phone or a computing device with telephone functions.

Information gateway **114**, also knows voice interactive server, voice server or proxy server, functions as a telephonic device and a data server. As a telephonic device, information gateway **114** operates on a telephone network (e.g. **100**) and is assigned to a telephone number (e.g. in US: 1-800-121-1515) and thus can communicate with any of telephonic devices on the network. In other words, a telephone on a telephone network can dial in the telephone number of information gateway **114** to establish a voice link. As a result, a user of the telephone from anywhere can interact with information gateway **114** to obtain desired information, for example, from the Internet.

5

10

15

20

13

Data network **116** may be the Internet, the Intranet or a

network of a private and a public network. Coupled thereon there

are a number of server devices **100**, each providing pertinent

information for other computing device to retrieve therefrom. For

5   example, server **100-1** is a stock quote server, e.g.

www.quotes.com, providing delayed or real-time stock quote

information. Server **100-n** is a news feeding server providing

updated national or worldwide news to general public. As used

herein, each of server devices **100** is interchangeably referred to as

10   a feeding server, a source server, a source provider or simply a

server. Generally, a source server hosts a plurality of information,

each piece of the information is identified by a file name, an entry in

a table or in a database and may be organized in accordance with

a category. The file name may include one or more words or

15   symbols. To fetch a piece of information, a network request must

be received from another computing device (e.g. information server

114). The network request shall include a file name to identify the

information being requested. In response to the network request,

the source server is configured to release the information that are

20   transported over the network.

Referring to **Figure 2A**, there is shown a functional block

diagram of an information server **200** according to one embodiment

of the present invention. Information server **200** may correspond to

information server **114** of **Figure 1**. As shown in **Figure 2A**, server

25   **114** comprises a phone network interface **202**, a network interface

204 and a server module **210** along with a processor **206** and a

14

storage space **208**. Phone network interface **202** that may be a PSTN interface permits server **200** to communicate with a telephone over a voice link in a PSTN. In other words, phone network interface **202** exchanges voice signals between a

5   telephone and server **200**.

Network interface **204** facilitates a data flow between data network **116** and server **200** and typically executes special set of rules (e.g. a communication protocol) for the end points in a link to send data back and forth. One of the common protocols is TCP/IP

10   (Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol) commonly used in the Internet. Network interface **204** manages the assembling of a message or file into data packets that are transmitted over data network **118** and reassembles received packets into the original message or file. In addition, it handles the address part of each

15   packet so that it gets to the right destination.

Server module **210** performs a series of functions as respectively described below. According to one aspect of the present invention, server **200** fetches pertinent information from data network **116** with respect to queries in real time or periodically

20   generated from server module **210** in response to requests placed by callers.

In operation, a caller makes a call to server **200** over network **100**, voice-to-text module **210** in server **200** converts a voice or audio signal from network **100** to a text signal. This may be

25   done by a voice recognition system in or coupled to server **200**.

15

According to one embodiment, a voice recognition system is a commercial product including software and hardware. When an analog audio signal is received, the A/D converter in the voice recognition system converts the audio signal to a corresponding digital signal. Software in the voice recognition system is configured to recognize the digital signal from speech patterns in the digital signal with respect to a database in the voice recognition system. The database may include vocabulary, syntaxes and grammars. The output of the voice recognition system is a text that should be understandable to both human beings and a computer. An exemplary voice recognition system may be obtained from Nuance Communications, Inc. having a business address of 1005 Hamilton Court, Menlo Park, CA 94025.

Outputs, referred to herein as spoken texts, from voice-to-text module **206** are processed in text processing module **212** to produce standard texts that is fed to a database **214**. According to one embodiment, database **214** maintains subscriber accounts that permit an administrator to manage and update subscriber information. Generally, a user or a subscriber can access some member-only services when a corresponding account is maintained in database **214**. The corresponding account may include, but not limited to, personal information of the user, different levels of services, and account information. In one embodiment, a user account is associated with a voice portal page that is also maintained in database **214**. The portal includes many items a user may frequently seek information thereof. The items may include,

but not be limited to, news categories, a list of stock symbols, bookmarks, and a list of contacts. The portal is accessible and managed from a computing device coupled to a data network, wherein the computing device executes a browsing application.

5   In addition, many information categories, often frequently requested, containing sub-categories or detailed information is also maintained in database **214**. As one of the features in the present invention, database **214** also includes a local searching data set that is generated, managed, and updated by data processing

10   module **218**. The local searching data set includes words or phrases to facilitate the generation of requests to be sent over network **116** for fetching requested information from one or more source servers on the network. For example, when a user speaks "ABC" in a news category, the word "ABC" is input to the local

15   searching data that includes a matching word corresponding to the word "ABC". For simplicity, the matching word is "ABC" as well and associated with "ABC NEWS". When the two words match, a network request to get news from www.abcnews.com is generated in server module **210** and/or network interface **204**. The request is

20   an IP request conforming to a communication protocol in the network, such as an HTTP request, wherein HTTP is hypertext transfer protocol. The request includes "ABC NEWS". As a result, information provided from www.abcnews.com is received. The implementation and operations of data processing module **218** as

25   well as the generation of the local searching data **212** will be provided in more detail below.

After requested information is received from the network, text processing module **212** processes the requested information to facilitate the generation of a speech signal of the received information. In one situation, text processing module **212** removes extra words from the received information. For example, a received stock price may contain an asking price, a bidding price, current volume, previously closed price, day high and day low while a user who is requesting the information is only interested in the asking price. Accordingly, text processing module **212** will remove all except the asking price. The filtered information (i.e. the asking price) is input to text-to-voice module **208** that converts the text into a speech signal to be played to the user. The text-to-voice module in one embodiment is provided from Fonix Corporation having a business of 1225 Eagle Gate Tower, 60 East South Temple, Salt Lake City, UT 84111.

As another feature of the present invention, server module **210** further includes frequency measurement module **216** that fetches most frequently requested information in advance and stores the pre-fetched information in database **214**. As a result, server module **210** or network interface **204** will not be busy repeatedly generating network requests seeking the same information so as to avoid causing network traffic in the network.

According to one embodiment, an information reservoir is maintained in database **214**. The information reservoir operates with frequency measurement module **216** and contains a plurality of information, each of pieces of the information is identified by an

identifier, hence a group of identifiers are respectively associated with the information in the reservoir. Typically, the information in the reservoir is periodically, automatically, respectively updated with respective source servers.

5   As used herein, an identifier includes one or more words and is used as a label, a symbol, an icon, a file name or a representation of a piece of information. To facilitate the description of the present invention, an identifier may take more than one forms identifying a piece of information. For example, an identifier

10   "GREENSPAN" and identifier "FED HIKING INTEREST AGAIN" mean the same article (i.e. information) provided by a source server. One may be used to name a file containing the information hosted in a source server feeder (e.g. located at www.newsagency.com). The other one may be used or spoken by

15   a user. Regardless, the identifiers can be easily associated with each other. Those skilled in the art understand many ways to associate different identifiers to one piece of information if desired.

          According to one embodiment, the information reservoir is organized under a list of identifiers, each of the identifiers linking to

20   a corresponding piece of detailed information that is archived locally, e.g. in database **214**. The entries (i.e. the identifiers) in the information reservoir are managed by frequency measurement module **216**. In one implementation, a counter is configured to monitor requests from callers. When repeated requests for the

25   same information is substantial, that means the information is highly demanding and of interest to the callers or subscribers. In

operation, the counter exceeds a certain number, for example 20 during last 5 minutes, which means the information is being substantially demanding, an entry of an identifier identifying the information is entered in the information reservoir. Information

5   associated with the entries in the information reservoir is automatically updated according to a schedule, for example, every 5 or 10 minutes. In other words, server module **210** is configured to generate respective network requests, each for one of the entries in the information reservoir. The requests are then sent respectively

10   to servers that provide corresponding information. In return, server module **210** receives the corresponding information and archive the received information accordingly. As a result, when a new request is received from a caller who desires to listen to a piece of information that is considered being frequently requested, the new

15   request can be locally fulfilled without accessing the network. In other words, the new request causes a retrieval of the particular information from database **214**.

Figure 2B shows an internal construction block of a computing system **220** in which the present invention may be

20   implemented and executed. System **220** may correspond to a server device (e.g. server **114**). System **220** includes a central processing unit (CPU) **222** interfaced to a data bus **220** and a device interface **224**. CPU **222** executes certain instructions to manage all devices and interfaces coupled to data bus **220** for

25   synchronized operations. Device interface **224** may be coupled to an external device such as a source server **100-1** hence requested

information (i.e. in form of HTML) therefrom is received into memory or storage through data bus **220**. Also interfaced or coupled to data bus **220** is display interface **226**, network interface **228**, printer interface **230** and floppy disk drive interface **238**. Generally, a compiled and linked version of one embodiment of the present invention is loaded into storage **236** through floppy disk drive interface **238**, network interface **228**, device interface **224** or other interfaces coupled to data bus **220**.

Main memory **232** such as random access memory (RAM) is also interfaced to data bus **220** to provide CPU **222** with the instructions and access to memory storage **236** for data and other instructions. In particular, when executing stored application program instructions, such as the complied and linked version of the present invention, CPU **222** is caused to manipulate the data to achieve results contemplated by the present invention. ROM (read only memory) **234** is provided for storing invariant instruction sequences such as a basic input/output operation system (BIOS) for operation of keyboard **240**, display **226** and pointing device **242** if there are any.

Figure 3A illustrates an exemplary information reservoir **302** according to one embodiment. Information reservoir **302** maintains a list of identifiers (e.g. **304** and **308**) that are frequently requested by callers. As an example, two of counters **312** have been activated to monitor two identifiers "MSFT" **304** and "GREENSPAN" **308** in information reservoir **302** after the counters determine respectively that there are enough requests received to justify that pieces of

21

information identified by "MSFT" **304** and "GREENSPAN" **308** shall be archived locally. More specifically, a stock with a symbol "MSFT" is being very active in a day and many callers have requested the stock price information of "MSFT". Likewise, a federal reserve meeting is in session and many subscribers may desire to know if any interests would be changed. Hence the news about the federal reserve meeting is identified by "GREENSPAN".

In operation, there are two different ways to enter the identifiers "MSFT" and "GREENSPAN" in information reservoir **302**. Identifier "MSFT" **304** is activated due to high demanding from the users. Many calls have been received during a predefined period, the counter activates identifier **304** so that detailed information **306** by the identifier can be pre-fetched from a server **314** supplying detailed information **306**. To keep detailed information **306** updated, information reservoir **302** is configured to send a network request to server **314** according to a schedule (i.e. every 20 min). In response to the network request, server **314** transports the request information to update detailed information **306** in the reservoir. Hence requests from all callers for the detailed information of MSFT stock can be fulfilled locally, namely a retrieval of detailed information **306** is performed with the reservoir in response to the requests. As will be described below, the identifiers (e.g. words in each of the identifiers) in the information reservoir can be also used to minimize ambiguities between two words, phrases, symbols, and identifiers that might be pronounced indistinctly.

Figure 3B illustrates a diagram 320 of counter vs. time. A threshold 322 may be manually decided. Counter 312 checks the received requests from the users. When a counter for "MSFT" exceeds threshold 322, the identifier "MSFT" is entered into the

5   reservoir. Same or different threshold 322 may be applied to another identifier "XYZ". A second counter is also used to monitor the identifier. As shown in the figure, the number of requests for "XYZ" does not exceed threshold 322, hence "XYZ" is not to be placed in the information reservoir. In this case, each of the

10   requests for "XYZ" will be processed separately and a corresponding network request thereof is generated to fetch corresponding information identified by "XYZ" from a server over the network.

The number of requests for "GREENSPAN" 308 in **Figure**

15   **3A** may not exceed a threshold as shown in **Figure 3C**. One of the reasons may be that no one would call for the detailed information before the end of the on-going federal reserve meeting. However, it can be foreseeable that the number of requests from the user could be skyrocketing as soon as a rumor spreads in the street that the

20   meeting is just finished. The information server 200 could instantly experience a substantial number of requests from its subscribers for the news. Such sudden burden to information server 200 may exceed its capacity. As another one of the features in the present invention, the counter can be readjusted to activate the entry of an

25   identifier into the information reservoir. There are a number of ways to implement the activation. One of the ways is simply a manual

entry of one or more identifiers by an administrator of the server in anticipation of high demands for information respectively identified by the one or more identifiers. **Figure 3C** shows an example in which threshold **322** is artificially lowered down to threshold **322'** so

5   that identifier "GREENSPAN" becomes qualified to be entered into the information reservoir. For example, instead of requiring 10 requests for the identifier within 5 minutes, now 3 requests within 3 minutes for the identifier may qualify the identifier to be entered into the information reservoir.

10   Another implementation involves an automatic notification from a feeding server that provides the information that can be potentially highly demanded. An arrangement between the information server and the feeding server may be arranged in advance. When the feeding server determines that a category

15   subscribed or demanded by the information server will be of highly interest to the subscribers of the information server, a notification is sent from the feeding server to the information server. Upon receiving the notification, the information server determines if it is necessary to fetch the information into its information reservoir. If

20   yes, the server module in the information server sends a request in response to the notification to the feeding server to fetch detailed information in the category.

Figure 4A shows a flowchart of a process **400** according to one embodiment of the present invention. Process **400** may be

25   implemented as a method, an apparatus, a software product and other forms to be deployed in a server providing voice interactive

services to subscribers/users. In a preferred embodiment, process **400** is implemented in a server module, for example, server module **210** of **Figure 2A**. Process **400** shall be understood in conjunction with preceding figures.

5   Typically a server providing voice interactive services is initially determined if there are any particular information that shall be locally archived. At **402**, identifiers identifying the particular information are respectively identified. For example, daily news, regardless of any requests therefor, may need to be locally

10   archived. A piece of domestic news may be identified by "DNEWS" and a piece of world news may be identified by "WNEWS". The same news could be requested by "local news" or "world news" over the voice line. Herein "DNEWS" and "WNEWS" are respectively associated with spoken texts "local news" or "world

15   news" but in a simpler form to identify two corresponding files containing the actual news information. The identifiers "local news" or "world news" are then entered into an information reservoir that is preferably locally accessible at **404**. According to one embodiment, each of the entered identifiers includes a "file"

20   identifier and an address identifying a server from which identified information can be fetched. The address may be an IP address. The "file" identifier (simply referring to as identifier) may be a file name of the identified information. If the identified information is in HTML format, the file name may be DNEWS.html or WNEWS.html

25   to follow the above example. It should be noted that it is not required to have the identifier in a local server to be identical to the

25

name of the file in a remotely located feeding server. In fact, any naming can be used as long as they correspond to each other so that only identified information will be located and fetched.

If there are identifiers to be considered at **402** or after a selected number of identifiers are entered in the information reservoir, process **400** goes to **406** to initialize a number of counters and respective thresholds at **406**. Generally, a counter is initialized to zero from which the counter increments every time there is an incident to the account. However, it is possible to initialize one or more counters to be other than zero to account for some special messages or information users would highly demand for in a given time. The thresholds may be manually determined depending on an actual situation. For example, a threshold for a particular stock symbol is adjusted particularly low for a few days, as an earning report thereof will be released on one of the days. The purpose is to qualify this particular stock faster to be entered into the information reservoir so that subsequent requests for the same stock symbol could be fulfilled locally. Likewise, the threshold for the same stock symbol can be adjusted very high to disqualify the entry or show a real justification to enter the stock into the information reservoir.

At **408**, a request is received from a caller. As described above, the request is derived from one or more spoken commands from a caller. At **410**, an identifier is extracted from the request. Typically, a request includes one or more words making the identifier. In one situation, the request is identical to the identifier,

26

such as "MSFT" when the caller is requested to speak a symbol of

a stock being interested. In another situation, the request includes

some extra words in addition to the identifier, such as "today's

world news" when the caller is requested to speak what kind of

news he/she is looking for. If the identifier being sought is "world

news", then the extra words will be filtered out before the identifier

is obtained. Optionally for an efficient implementation, the identifier

may be mapped to "WNEWS" for easy fetching from a feeding

server or local retrieval. In this case, the first identifier is referred to

as spoken identifier and the mapped identifier is referred to as

actual identifier typically used in a network request for fetching

identified information thereof. In yet another situation, the request

includes words less than what a spoken identifier should have. For

example, when referring to a local well-known restaurant, people

usually do not speak the name in its entirety, rather a shortened

version thereof, such as "Paolo's Restaurant" as "Paolo's". The

actual identifier must be constructed from the spoken version. The

detailed description of constructing an actual identifier from the

spoken version will be provided below.

After the identifier is obtained, it is checked to see if the

identifier has a corresponding one in the information reservoir at

412. When it is determined that the identifier matches in the

information reservoir, locally archived information identified by the

identifier is retrieved at **414**. The retrieved information is then sent

to the caller at **418** in response to the request received at **408**. If it

turns out that the identifier does not have a match in the information

27

reservoir at **414**, the server module generates a network request at **416**. The network request includes the identifier and a corresponding address (e.g. an IP address) to fetch the identified information from a server identified by the address. The fetched information is then sent to the caller at **418** in response to the request received at **408**.

Referring now back to **412**, after it is determined that the identifier has no corresponding entry in the information reservoir, a counter therefor increments per the identifier at **420**. The counter may be just assigned or is designated to the identifier depending on how many times the identifier has requested. At **422**, the counter is checked to see if it exceeds a threshold. The threshold is one of the criteria that may qualify the identifier to be entered in the information reservoir. Typically, when the counter is higher, that means the demand for the identified information is high, which justifies the local reservation of the identified information. After determining that the counter does exceed the threshold or other particular reasons, the identifier is entered into the information reservoir at **424**. To ensure that callers always get the latest requested information, the information reservoir is periodically updated at **426** with reference to the respective identifiers thereof.

As another feature of the present invention, an archived identifier is used to minimize ambiguities between two identifiers that might be pronounced indistinctly. Sometimes, a user may not pronounce a word or title incorrectly or two words/phrases do sound similarly, a voice recognition system may output a text

28

slightly different from the actual text. The archived identifier may be used to correct the spoken text. For example, words "too" and "two", "pair" and "pear", "air" and "ear" could be all pronounced indistinctly. In stock symbols, they are many symbols that could be hardly distinct by pronunciation. It is rather difficult for a voice/speech recognition system to distinguish such pair unless the contexts are referred to (while in stock symbols, the context is hardly available). **Figure 4B** shows a flowchart of a process **450** that can be implemented to minimize ambiguities between two words, symbols, phrases, or identifiers that might be pronounced indistinctly. Process **450** may be implemented as a method, an apparatus, a software product and other forms to be deployed in a server providing voice interactive services to subscribers/users. In a preferred embodiment, process **450** is implemented in a server module, for example, server module **210** of **Figure 2A**. Process **400** shall be understood in conjunction with **Figure 4A**.

As described above, after **424**, the information reservoir contains a plurality of identifiers, some are entered as a result of users' high demands and others are entered due to a physical adjustment of the threshold to anticipate a high demand thereof or other reasons. According to one aspect of the present invention, the other reasons is to improve overall accuracy of the voice interactive system by minimizing ambiguities between two words, symbols, phrases, or identifiers that might be pronounced indistinctly and result in incorrectly identified information.

At **452** a spoken identifier is received from, for example, a

voice recognition system that has received a speech signal from a

caller. In accordance with **Figure 4B**, the spoken identifier is a

spoken version of an actual identifier. In some cases, the voice

5   recognition system may output a confidence coefficient that

indicates how accurate the spoken version has been recognized.

The confidence coefficient may trigger a verification of the spoken

identifier. It should be noted that often one or more words in an

identifier could be pronounced indistinctly. It is now evident to those

10   skilled in the art that a counter used to track the occurrence of an

identifier is equally applied to the tracking of the occurrence of a

word. Regardless, it can be assumed that a list of words or

identifiers have been marked (or collected in the information

reservoir) to assist the minimization of any ambiguities between two

15   similar words.

At **454**, the list is looked up for a similarity match to the

spoken word or identifier received from **452**. A similarity match is

used herein to indicate that there are two words or identifiers that

could be either pronounced substantially similarly or spelled

20   substantially similarly. For example, there is a similarity match

between words "too" and "two", "pair" and "pear", "air" and "ear". If

the list turns out that no word therein could have a similarity match

to the spoken word or identifier received from **452**, process 450

goes to **410** of **Figure 4A**. If the list turns out that there is a word

25   that has a similarity match to the spoken word or identifier received

from **452**, the word in the list is to replace the spoken word or

30

identifier at **456**. As a result, a correct word or identifier is obtained to facilitate process **400** of **Figure 4A**.

Referring to **Figure 5A**, there is shown a functional diagram **500** of generating an identifier from spoken words **502** by a caller.

5   Spoken words **502** are generally an output from a text processing module and contain one or more words. Keys words **504** are derived from spoken words **502** and typically include less (or equal) number of words than spoken words **502** contain. Keys words **504** are then input to local search data set **506** to form a complete

10   identifier **508**. The identifier can be used to exactly identify what the caller looks for.

Figure 5B illustrates an example **510** in which the spoken words are "Paolo's in Sunnyvale". When a caller is looking for information about a restaurant named "Paolo's Restaurant",

15   perhaps to make a reservation, he/she is likely to ignore the generic word "Restaurant". After a text processing, and secondary or auxiliary words, such as in "Sunnyvale" are removed, leaving only the key words "Paolo's". Through a local search data set, generic word or words that are relevant to the key words are added in a

20   linguistic sense, resulting in an identifier comprising the complete words set.

As seen from **Figure 5A**, function diagram **500** requires a local search data set that is typically generated from titles, names, slogans, each identifying a piece of information provided by a

25   server via the information server. Preferably, under distinct

31

categories, each of the pieces of information in a category is identified by an identifier that can be one of the titles, names, slogans.

Figure 6A shows a flowchart of a process **600** to generate a local searching data set and shall be understood in conjunction with **Figures 6B-6E** together with the preceding figures. Process **600** may be implemented as a method, an apparatus, a software product and other forms that can be deployed in a server providing voice interactive services to subscribers/users. In a preferred embodiment, process **600** is implemented in a server module, for example, as data processing module **218** of **Figure 2A**.

At **602**, process **600** is initiated to receive all identifiers (i.e. the corresponding information) that a voice interactive server is configured to provide. Typically, a server is designed to provide a limited number of information categories, such as News, Sports, Weather, Greetings, Calendar, Bookmark, Address Book, Directions and Inquiries. Under each of the categories, there are a limited number of sub categories. According to one embodiment, process **600** is repeatedly executed for each of the categories, sub-categories, sub-sub-categories, or a given group. If a given group is configured to have N kinds of information available for a user to listen to, there may be N identifiers, each identifying one kind of the information. Generally, the identifiers are provided by a feeding server that hosts, manages, updates identified information. Hence process **600** is to check at **602** if there are any or N identifiers

available for the process to proceed. When there are identifiers available, process **600** goes to **604**.

At **604**, the received identifiers are processed. One of the purposes at **604** is to remove uncommonly used symbols in an identifier if there are any. For example, an economic news title, used as an identifier, is "[MSFT] MICROSOFT Challenged". The actual title is "MICROSOFT Challenged" while the prefix "[MSFT]" is intentionally provided to the investment community with the corresponding stock symbol. From an information search or library archival perspective, the prefix is not necessary. Hence after **604**, such prefix is filtered out. It should be noted that it is not possible to list all possible removable symbols or words herein, as they are very much depending on the information category. One word or symbol is considered removable in one category while becoming a key word in another category. One of the important functions provided by **604** is to facilitate the efficient operation of process **600**.

As described above, one of the purposes at **604** is to remove uncommonly used symbols with reference to one particular category. In addition, depending on an actual meaning, a symbol is sometimes replaced with a word, for example; "Fish & Chips", in which symbol "&" can be replaced with a word "and". The implementation of this process may be done through a look-up-table.

At **606**, a filtered identifier is examined to locate the breaks
between words or symbols. A histogram is computed at **608** for all
of the identifiers from **606**. **Figure 6B** shows a histogram **630**
computed from a group of identifiers, each including one or more

5   words or symbols. Horizontal line **632** of histogram **630** indicates
every distinct word in the group of identifiers and vertical line **634** of
histogram **630** indicates the number of times of a word appeared in
the group of identifiers. **Figure 6C** shows a group of actual
identifiers **644** under a restaurant category. Each of the identifiers

10   **644** is a restaurant name that may lead to detailed information
about the restaurant, a direction to get there, a menu of house
specialties or perhaps a reservation line. When a histogram of
identifiers **644** is computed, the corresponding histogram **646** is
shown in **Figure 6D**. As is shown, there are 5 occurrences for

15   "restaurant", 3 occurrences for "cuisine", 2 occurrences for "Fish &
Chips", and 1 occurrence for the rest of the words.

Referring **Figure 6B** in view of **Figure 6D**, those words that
occur the most are considered generic words while those words
that occur the least are considered key words. It may be

20   understood by now that the key words, or their combinations if
combined correctly, provide the most information about the nature
of the information being identified. In the restaurant category, for
example, "Azuma" indicates a specific name of a restaurant. On the
other side, the generic words do not provide too much useful

25   information, such as "restaurant" or "cuisine" in the restaurant
category. Histogram **630** shows that there are some marginal

34

words **638**. The marginal words appear in a "gray" area of the histogram, meaning that a clear cut between the generic and key words is not straightforward. At **610**, the marginal words must be grouped into either the generic words group or the key words group.

According to one embodiment, a manual inspection is provided. Marginal word **648** in histogram **646** is grouped into key words group **650** after such manual inspection is performed. Another possible way to decide which group the marginal words shall belong to is to base on its linguistic meanings. If the meaning of a marginal word is close to what the generic words mean, the marginal word is grouped into the generic words group, otherwise into the key words group.

Sometimes, some of the key words are regrouped out of the grouping of the marginal words. Conjunction words, such as "and" could be often fall into the marginal words group. Still another way to group such marginal words is to go back to the original identifier to see if it is necessary to combine one or more key words to form a combined key words. **Figure 6E** shows an identifier **660** "The Texas Fish and Chips Food" reformatted from "The Texas Fish & Chips Food". A directional search (i.e. from right to left **662** and from left to right **664**) is performed. When a search is from right to left **662**, words are verified with the generic words group and the key words group. If a word in identifier **660** is one of the generic words, search **662** proceeds till a key word is hit. The same approach is applied to search **664** from left to right. With the margin

word "and" **666**, key words on both sides are verified to see if it is meaningful to combine the keywords together with the marginal word to form a combined key word. Quite often with a conjunction word, it is very likely to generate a combined key word. As a result, combined key word **668** is generated. With the newly generated combined key word **668**, the marginal word "and" is diminished.

Once the generic words are finalized from **610**, the generic words are removed at **612**, thus leaving only the key words (including any possible combined key words). The key words are organized in a logic way that would form part of the original identifier. Hence a local search data set is formed. According to one embodiment, a local search data set is organized as a tree structure suitable for efficient searching. **Figure 6F** shows an exemplary portion **670** of a tree structure for the keywords of identifiers **644**. It is assumed that a caller spoke only "Fish & Chips" that is input to the tree structure for matching. A node **672** has a corresponding key word (or combined key word), hence a tree search known to those skilled in the art will lead to node **672**. Record information of the node shows that there are two restaurants that could be referred to as "Fish & Chips" in this category or a defined city or region as shown in **Figure 6G**. In operation, the called will be prompted for a clarification as to which restaurant the caller might be referring to.

If the spoken text from a caller is "Gold", the tree structure is again searched. Eventually, a node **674** containing the corresponding matching word is located. A corresponding record of

36

the node is further examined as shown in **Figure 6H**. Associated

key words **676** are retrieved and "stitched" accordingly. The

stitched key words are then to go through a generic words process

678 to complete an identifier "Gold Ribbon Bakeshop & Restaurant"

5   **680**. The finished identifier points to detailed information about the

restaurant the caller is trying to find out. It should be noted that the

identifier in this example is to recover a complete title or name of a

business entity. Those skilled in the art can understand that the

description is equally applied to other forms of identifiers, for

10   example, a title, a name, a filename, a symbol, an IP address and a

short article.

The invention described herein may be implemented as a

method, an apparatus, a system or a software product. The

processes, sequences or steps and features disclosed in the

15   present invention are related to each other and each is believed

independently novel in the art. The disclosed processes,

sequences or steps and features may be performed alone or in any

combination to provide a novel and unobvious system or a portion

of a system.

20   At least portions of the invention can be embodied as

computer readable code on a computer readable medium. The

computer readable medium is any data storage device that can

store data that can be thereafter read by a computing device.

Examples of the computer readable medium include read-only

25   memory, random-access memory, disk drives, floppy disks, CD-

ROMs, DVDs, magnetic tape, optical data storage devices, carrier

37

waves. The computer readable media can also be distributed over network coupled computer systems so that the computer readable code is stored and executed in a distributed fashion.

The present invention has been described in sufficient detail with a certain degree of particularity. It is understood to those skilled in the art that the present disclosure of embodiments has been made by way of examples only and that numerous changes in the arrangement and combination of parts may be resorted without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as claimed. While the embodiments discussed herein may appear to include some limitations as to the presentation of the information units, in terms of the format and arrangement, the invention has applicability well beyond such embodiment, which can be appreciated by those skilled in the art. Accordingly, the scope of the present invention is defined by the appended claims rather than the forgoing description of embodiments.